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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PHNOM PENH 000488

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR S, D, P, EAP/MLS, AND EAP/RSP J.
VORDERSTRASSE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [CB](#)
SUBJECT: CAMBODIA WELCOMES MEKONG MINISTERIAL

REF: A. STATE 72103
[1](#)B. PHNOM PENH 474

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Cambodia welcomes the proposed Mekong Ministerial and agenda as a mechanism not only for greater regional cooperation on issues of mutual concern, but also to enhance U.S. engagement in the region. Cambodia suggests that future such meetings should also include other key regional actors such as Burma and China. A meeting between Deputy Prime Minister Hor Namhong and Secretary Clinton during the DPM's visit to the U.S. to attend the UN General Assembly this September would further demonstrate the USG's interest in the region and provide a valuable opportunity to discuss key issues in our expanding bilateral relationship. End Summary and Comment.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Ambassador delivered Ref A demarche and non-paper July 14 to Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary of State for ASEAN Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFA). Kao Kim Hourn welcomed the proposal as an opportunity to meet and exchange views on regional issues and concerns, and emphasized that this meeting serves as an additional mechanism to enhance the U.S.-ASEAN partnership. He hopes that meetings such as this will be held regularly in the future. He assured the Ambassador that Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hor Namhong will be well-prepared to discuss the topics, keeping his interventions short and to the point in recognition of the time constraints for the meeting. The DPM plans to arrive in Phuket July 18 directly from Cairo where he is currently participating in the Non-Aligned Movement meeting.

Proposed Topics Are Relevant

[1](#)3. (SBU) Kao Kim Hourn said that the three proposed topics are of particular relevance to the people of the region, and stressed that an educated and healthy population is critical for Cambodia's competitiveness. The Ambassador highlighted the benefits of the Forecast Mekong, as demonstrated at the recent DRAGON summit in Siem Reap (Ref B). Kao Kim Hourn explained that while climate change and the Mekong have been the subject of many discussions, there is still a lack of scientific information on possible impacts to Cambodia and the region and welcomed this new tool. The Ambassador commented that although the Mekong River Commission (MRC) has produced valuable scientific and technical information, this information has not been effectively communicated to the key political decision-makers in the region to inform their discussions on appropriate policy responses. Kao Kim Hourn conceded that two weaknesses of the MRC were a lack of information on downstream impacts of dam projects and that some member states do not respect the MRC's rules. He also noted that the absence of China from the MRC was another weakness and told the Ambassador that when he queried a

Chinese official on why China is not a member of the MRC, the official questioned the reasonableness of China agreeing to be bound by old rules stemming from the MRC's creation many decades ago. (Note: This obfuscates MRC's 1995 push to update its charter and bring China in; China still refused. End Note.)

Expanding Participation to Burma and China

¶4. (SBU) While recognizing the current difficulties in U.S.-Burma relations, Kao Kim Hourn conveyed DPM Hor Namhong's suggestion that the U.S. consider extending the Mekong group countries to include both China and Burma in future such meetings, given the potential impact of dam projects on downstream countries and the vulnerability of open borders to infectious diseases. He also noted that Cambodia seeks to encourage Burma to make progress and engage with the international community and suggested that participating in these meetings would help to encourage Burma along these lines.

DPM-SECSTATE Meeting

¶5. (SBU) Kao Kim Hourn expressed his appreciation of the intensification of U.S. engagement with ASEAN. He also informed the Ambassador that DPM Hor Namhong plans to arrive in the U.S. for the 64th UN General Assembly on September 24, and was particularly interested in attending the High-Level meeting on climate change. (Note: The climate change meeting is scheduled to occur on September 22. We will

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convey this discrepancy to the MFA. End Note.)

¶6. (SBU) Comment: A meeting between the DPM and Secretary Clinton during the DPM's visit to the U.S. would provide an opportunity to engage on key issues in our bilateral relationship, including cooperation on counterterrorism, Cambodia's participation in UN peacekeeping missions in Sudan, Chad, and the Central African Republic, and the expanding military-to-military relationship.
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